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How to Create Your Personal Brand

By Jack Perry

Branding in this country has a long history, especially in the retail industry. Giant retailers consistently invest millions to make themselves foremost in your mind. Once they're embedded in your mind, you're programmed to expect certain quality, consistency, and benefits from their product. Then as these companies continue to expose you to their brands and their benefits, the connection grows, until they become synonymous with your particular needs.

A brand promises a result and experience you can count on. Most people understand and accept that companies and products have brands and images, which become part of the mental picture in their clients' minds. Additionally, individuals in certain professions develop brands (i.e. surgeons, attorneys, authors, sales professionals) and have built client bases around them.

What about you – the individual in sales and sales management? Can you brand yourself? Yes! Regardless of your chosen profession, you can establish a strong brand for yourself as an individual. This is especially important if you work in a big company, because you don't want to get lost in the crowd. By branding yourself in some way, you become distinctive.

How can you establish your own personal brand? Embrace the following seven steps.

1. Identify What You Value: Your personal brand is ultimately a reflection of everything you value. For example, if you value honesty, then your brand will likely reflect the way you're always honest with your clients and prospects. Or if you value knowledge, then your brand will likely incorporate the way you acquire, use, and communicate information.

So take time to really think about the things you value in your life. List them. Make sure the values you identify are truly your own because you must believe in and live by them every day. These values will become the foundation for your brand, as well as your personal mission statement. They will help you align yourself and everything you do with what you choose to stand for.

2. Identify What Makes You Unique: With your values as your foundation, the next step is to determine your specific uniqueness. Everyone is unique and special in some way. For example, maybe you are the only salesperson on your team with children. In this case, you can relate to other parents on a different level than anyone else in your company. Or maybe you are the only one with a background in technology, so you know exactly how to meet the needs of people in that industry.

How are you different as an individual? How are you unique? And how are your products and services different? Incorporate this uniqueness into your brand.

3. Identify How You Want To Be Perceived: Branding is about other people's perceptions of you. You have the power to control most of these perceptions with your actions and presentation. Obviously, some people simply won't like you, and others will be jealous of you. But you can control most perceptions.

Consider how you want to be perceived in your clients' and prospects' minds. Whether you like it or not, you already have a reputation with the people you know. Maybe you're branded as the slob in the group, or the big mouth; whatever it is, you have a brand. Now you need to decide if you like that brand. Ask yourself, "Is this the brand I want?" If not, are you willing to make the commitment and do something about it? You have to want the prize and be willing to do the work.

4. Identify Your Specialty: Next, consider what specialty you want to be known for and take action to achieve it. If you want to be branded as a great public speaker, then you have to pay your dues and join the National Speakers Association, hire coaches, take constructive criticism, get up and talk, and work your way through that crowd. If you want to be branded as the best value-added salesperson, then you have to bring extra value to every client or prospect meeting. Your prospects might not like the particular idea you bring every time they meet with you, but they will take your calls and meet with you because they know they can expect new and valuable ideas from you. When you're consistent with your specialty, everyone will know you for it.

5. Identify Your Target Market: The goal of branding is to build customer loyalty. As you're creating your brand, you need to determine your target market and speak directly to them. For example, if you sell minivans, then you might target mothers with three or more children in your brand. But if you sell pick-up trucks, then you will obviously need to speak to a completely different audience.

Also, you want your target audience to feel they really need your expertise. In other words, you don't want them to say, "She's good." Rather, you want them to say, "I've got to have her as an advisor!" You want people to think that your brand will make a difference in their lives, so it must be meaningful to the end user. And it must create a vivid picture in their mind of results and guaranteed satisfaction. Essentially your brand is a trust label, and loyalty comes from that trust.

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6. Write Your Brand: Now that you know all the elements that form your brand, you have to actually write the statement. A brand is a phrase that jumps out at you from the page and grabs your emotions. Start by incorporating at least one action verb. Then keep it short and simple. You want to make it unique, memorable, and repeatable. You also want it to ring an emotional bell that causes clients and prospects to focus on you, and you alone, when they need your type of service (i.e.: Action Jackson gets results).

7. Visualize, Walk, and Talk Your Brand: Finally, once you have created your brand, you must publicize it. Start acting your brand immediately. Tell others about it and ask them to spread the word. Establish a group of advocates who understand you and can publicize your brand to all the people they know. This will create a word of mouth buzz. You don't want to let these people go too long without hearing from you. Keep in contact with them and keep your brand circulating.

Also, circulate your brand by publishing articles, collecting testimonials from clients, and creating a tagline that goes with what you are. You want to make yourself as visible as possible. So be able to describe your business succinctly, speak in front of people, have a presence, and, most important, be consistent with your brand.

Your Brand for the Future: Brand takes reputation a step further. Branding means demonstrating and aggressively promoting what you're known for. Essentially, it takes your reputation to a higher level of awareness and publicity.

By branding yourself, you separate yourself from the crowd and create greater impact – for you. When you embrace these seven steps for establishing and publicizing your personal brand, you can build your customer loyalty and win over new clients with the winning image you create in their minds.

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